Pilot testing a computerized CBT program in a remote Arctic region: Nunavut youth and youth workers reflect on SPARX

How to cite:
Khourochvili, Mariami; Bohr, Yvonne; Litwin, Leah; Lucassen, Mathijs and Merry, Sally (2016). Pilot testing a computerized CBT program in a remote Arctic region: Nunavut youth and youth workers reflect on SPARX. In: Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies (ABCT) 50th Annual Convention, 27-30 Oct 2016, New York City.

For guidance on citations see FAQs.

© [not recorded]
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/

Version: Version of Record
Pilot testing a computerized CBT program in a remote Arctic region: Nunavut youth and youth workers reflect on SPARX

Mariami Khourochvili1, Yvonne Bohr1,2, Leah Litwin1, Mathijs Lucassen3,4, and Sally Merry4

1 LAMarsh Centre for Child and Youth Research, York University, Canada; 2 Aisling Discoveries, Canada; 3 The Open University, United Kingdom; 4 University of Auckland, New Zealand

in collaboration with the Government of Nunavut & Qaujigiartiit Health Research Centre.

Background

Evidence suggests that computerized CBT (cCBT) may be effective for treating depression (Andrews et al., 2010; Richardson, Stallard, and Velleman, 2010). Youth depression is one of the most significant health concerns in Nunavut (Canada) but access to mental health services remains limited (Kirmayer et al., 2000). Furthermore, suicide rates in Inuit populations have more than tripled in the past 20 years (Chachamovich et al., 2013). There is a need for a culturally relevant intervention that will reach Inuit youth in remote communities who may be at risk.

The current project is a pilot evaluation. Youth in Nunavut have completed the SPARX program, and feedback from youth and youth workers was used to evaluate SPARX with a view to possible future development.

Method

Twelve youth participants completed the SPARX program. Eight community worker participants from Nunavut supervised the youth during the SPARX trial. Participants completed focus group interviews about their experiences of SPARX. Thematic analysis was used to analyze focus group data.

Results

Four themes were identified based on youth worker feedback:

1. Positive changes in the youth who had completed SPARX. Youth were more conscious of how they reacted in various situations, were more aware of their feelings, seemed empowered, and thought about SPARX skills in daily life.
2. Need for access to SPARX for all youth. SPARX could benefit other youth struggling with low mood and past trauma. SPARX was seen as a fun way to learn emotional coping skills.
3. SPARX should be modified to be Inuit-specific. Adapting SPARX might make youth more engaged and encouraged, SPARX would also be more relatable and familiar. Suggestions consisted of making it resemble a Northern environment; reflect Nunavut fashion; include Inuit names, and include some Inuit languages; and have rewards that were more Inuit-specific.
4. Systematic challenges encountered when administering SPARX should be addressed. Youth workers faced several challenges e.g. recruiting and maintaining youth involvement, time pressures, venue and storage of laptops issues. Teachers should supervise youth, and there is a need for ‘back-up’ workers. Discussions with youth should occur after each module to ensure understanding and eliminate any technical issues.

SPARX is a seven-module game-like computer program (Merry et al., 2012; Shepherd et al., 2015). Youth are required to guide their avatar through a series of challenges whilst simultaneously developing CBT skills such as relaxation, positive thinking, and coping thoughts.

SPARX is designed to help adolescents identify and challenge negative thoughts, recognize and cope with stress and anxiety associated with common life stressors, whilst simultaneously meeting the cultural needs of local communities.

References


Conclusion

Currently, there is a push for the provision of culturally-sensitive mental health services, and SPARX could become a useful tool if made available to Canada’s Inuit youth. Nunavut youth and youth workers demonstrated a strong interest in making SPARX Inuit-specific thereby supporting the development of a cultural adaptation of SPARX.